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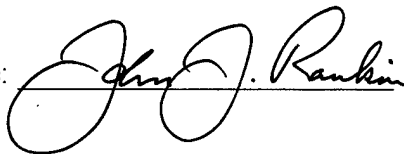
MEU(SOC)s IN THE 21ST CENTURY: WILL THEY BE CAPABLE OF CONDUCTING  
HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS?

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the Joint Military Operations Course.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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## ABSTRACT

New concepts associated with Operational Maneuver From the Sea (OMFTS) are analyzed to determine whether they will enhance or degrade the capability of the Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU(SOC)) to conduct the most likely missions it will encounter in the early parts of the 21st century - humanitarian operations. A brief overview of the organization and missions of the MEU(SOC) is followed by an examination of the lessons learned following MEU(SOC) involvement in specific humanitarian type missions including humanitarian interventions, disaster relief, and noncombatant evacuation operations.

Concepts and structures currently being considered as a part of OMFTS implementation are also analyzed. These include sea-based logistics (SBL) and Mini-MEU(SOC)s. SBL and the Mini-MEU(SOC) would significantly alter the way future MEU(SOC)s are structured and how they are supported when deployed. Suggestions have been made that any significant change in MEU(SOC) structure should include a review of force projection methods including deployment cycles. Proposals by senior Navy and Marine Officers to change these methods are reviewed.

It is clear that doctrinal and organizational changes will be required to better prepare the MEU(SOC) for the challenges of the 21st century. There is a danger, however, that some of the changes being proposed under OMFTS will reduce the MEU(SOC)'s effectiveness in conducting humanitarian operations.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU (SOC)) program has been described by the current Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. Charles Krulak, as the Corps' "jewel in the crown." His description is appropriate because the MEU(SOC) is an extremely responsive, flexible, potent operational tool that is available to respond to a unified commander's needs on a moments notice, three-hundred and sixty five days out of the year.

Numerous crises over the years, particularly those which have occurred since the collapse of the Soviet Union, have demonstrated that the MEU(SOC) is one of the fastest ways to initiate a response to a potential crisis. Many times in the recent past we have turned on the evening news and seen a MEU(SOC) appearing off the coast of some trouble spot. In some instances, their presence alone may have had a calming effect on the situation. In others, Marines have gone ashore to either implement American policy, protect lives, or secure U.S. national interests.

Within the last few years there have been fundamental changes in the operational doctrine of both the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Marine Corps. In consonance with the conceptual template of Joint Vision 2010, the Department of the Navy's "From the Sea" and "Forward From the Sea" have provided a new focus for the Navy/Marine Corps team in the 21st century. That focus is on green water operations combined with a high probability of littoral land operations.

From this doctrinal shift has been the development of new concepts for the conduct of future littoral operations. Operational

Maneuver from the Sea (OMFTS) is the Marine Corps' new concept of how expeditionary forces will be employed to project power ashore. This new concept and some of its tenets may well change the structure and capabilities of the MEU(SOC). This paper will examine how aspects of OMFTS may limit the ability of the MEU(SOC) in the 21st century to conduct some critical types of military operations other than war (MOOTW). Specifically, it may limit MEU(SOC) effectiveness in conducting humanitarian operations. For the purpose of this paper, references to humanitarian operations include missions involving humanitarian intervention, disaster relief, and noncombatant evacuations.

## II. BACKGROUND

### WHAT IS A MEU(SOC)?

Although its name has changed periodically, the basic structure of a MEU has existed for decades. Built around battalion landing teams, tactical air and helicopter squadrons, and combat service support units, from its inception, the MEU was created to provide a mobile, flexible, versatile, and ready forward deployed force.<sup>1</sup> With the growth of terrorism in the late 1970's and early 1980's, the Marine Corps looked into ways of structuring its forces to respond to low-intensity war and MOOTW type conflicts. Instead of creating separate special operations forces like the other services, the Corps opted to provide its regular forces with special training prior to deployment. Training was designed to make deployed units dual-purposed, i.e., capable of performing specific tasks and missions in addition to conventional missions.

In order to be designated as special operations capable, a MEU must jointly train and qualify with the amphibious squadron (PHIBRON) with which it will deploy. Following what is normally a six month training period and a formal evaluation by a Marine Special Operations Training Group (SOTG), the MEU/PHIBRON team will receive its SOC qualification for a given deployment. The first MEU designated as special operations capable was deployed in 1986.<sup>2</sup>

Although the MEU(SOC) is probably the smallest forward deployed U.S. force (normally between 1,900 and 2,200 Marines and Sailors), because of its expeditionary and amphibious nature, it is also one of the most responsive. The MEU(SOC) is trained and equipped to perform over twenty different missions covering a wide range of both conventional and special operations. On the special operations end of the spectrum, MEU(SOC)s are capable of such missions as in-extremis hostage rescue, clandestine recovery operations, and tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel (TRAP) missions similar to the one which recovered Air Force Capt. Scott O'Grady in Bosnia. At the conventional end of the spectrum, MEU(SOC)s perform more traditional missions such as amphibious assaults and show-of-force operations.<sup>3</sup> Also, however, they conduct other types of missions which have seen a sharp increase in recent years - humanitarian operations. And, the prospects of MEU(SOC) involvement in these operations in the future seem to be increasing.

The Navy-Marine Corps team will continue serving as the primary element of our nation's forward presence, especially as opportunities for our overseas basing of American forces decline...Our [forces] will be positioned forward to deter crisis, and will be on-scene to respond should deterrence fail...Our forward presence posture means we will be asked to conduct disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, and noncombatant evacuation

operations, a traditional role our military forces have performed exceptionally well through the years.<sup>4</sup>

#### **THE MSSG: KEY TO THE MOST LIKELY MEU(SOC) MISSIONS**

A vital operational consideration in the conduct of humanitarian operations is the pivotal role of logistics. In fact, logistics requirements may dominate these operations and can present extraordinary demands on the forces providing that support. Adding to the difficulty of these types of operations, they are likely to be short or no-notice, individually unique from previous operations, and in austere environments.

Within the MEU(SOC), the key logistics provider is the MEU Service Support Group (MSSG). With its organic resources and those of the Amphibious Ready Group (ARG), the MEU(SOC) can be sustained ashore for up to fifteen days. Any operations beyond fifteen days require resupply from outside of the MEU. Despite the limitations in the duration of the support it can offer, the MSSG provides an impressive range of support which makes it uniquely qualified for independent (although short-duration) operations.<sup>5</sup>

Though it is task organized for each specific deployment, the MSSG is a company-sized unit and has a standard configuration. Organized by functional components, it normally consists of eight platoons which provide the logistics sustainment for the MEU(SOC). Included among these are the headquarters, medical, maintenance, supply, engineer, communications, landing support, and motor transport platoons.<sup>6</sup> While each provides its own unique support, the true benefit is derived from the collective multi-functional ability of these units when merged together as a combat service support unit.



Notwithstanding the collective effect of these elements when grouped together, certain types of operations place a greater burden on specific functions of the MSSG. As already mentioned, experience has shown that humanitarian operations frequently become logistics focused missions. It is also true that within logistics units participating in these operations, the most in-demand support is usually motor transport and engineering capability.

For the MSSG, small organization that it is, these operations pose a unique problem: not only must it support the MEU(SOC), but, it must also support the relief or evacuation effort itself. The MSSG's motor transport platoon is usually equipped with up to 28 heavy five-ton cargo trucks and up to four logistics vehicle systems (LVSSs). These assets are used for the transportation of troops as well as the distribution of supplies including a capability for hauling limited quantities of fuel and water. The engineer platoon has a very limited deliberate engineering capability in the form of heavy earth moving equipment for horizontal construction. Its most significant capability, however, especially with regards to supporting humanitarian operations, is its ability to purify water and to produce electrical power. The engineer platoon normally deploys with two Reverse Osmosis Water Purification Units (ROWPUs) and a variety of trailer mounted generators capable of providing mobile electrical power. To put these assets into perspective, collectively, they are capable of purifying up to 1,200 gallons of potable water per hour and providing enough electrical power for a small town.<sup>7</sup>

### III. PAST EXPERIENCE: MEU(SOC)s AND HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

Before looking at what the future MEU(SOC) might look like, it is important to first look at the important lessons learned from past MEU(SOC) participation in humanitarian operations.

#### HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION

During Operation Provide Comfort, the 24th MEU(SOC) was assigned as a part of the JTF formed to provide humanitarian relief to Kurds in northern Iraq. An extremely complex operation due its location and distance inland, Provide Comfort created challenges for a MEU(SOC) which pushed their logistics capability to the limit. Operating from the port of Iskenderun, Turkey, the 24th MEU(SOC) was to establish a forward support base, at Silopi, Turkey from which relief supplies could be further distributed to refugees in the mountains of northwestern Iraq. The forward support base, established more than 450 miles from the port, included most of the 24th MEU's MSSG. From the base the MSSG pushed relief supplies forward to refugee sites via helicopter and tactical vehicle convoy. In addition, they quickly brought in ROWPUs to produce potable water, and set up Medical/Dental Civil Action Projects (MED/DENCAP).<sup>8</sup> Though the MSSG was extremely successful during the operation, its commander acknowledged that his unit was stretched to the limit. Among other things, the after-action reports stressed the need for more truck assets, fuel/water distribution capability, and ROWPUs.<sup>9</sup> It was also noted that the MEU(SOC) frequently provided support to other U.S. and Allied JTF forces due to the fact that most did not come with any organic logistics support of their own.<sup>10</sup>

The most notable humanitarian intervention mission in the recent past was Operation Restore Hope in Somalia. Although the operation was a massive undertaking involving a multi-national force under the United Nations and more than 50 humanitarian relief organizations, MEU(SOC)s played an important role.<sup>11</sup> Between March and June 1993, the 24th MEU(SOC) was deployed to Somalia to support relief operations in the Kismayo Humanitarian Relief Sector. Though a relatively small organization, the 24th MEU(SOC) conducted a balance of military and humanitarian operations in the sector which, at one point, extended as far as 150 miles inland.<sup>12</sup> Military missions included both show-of-force and cordon-and-search operations, while humanitarian missions involved setting up MED/DENCAPs and transporting supplies for relief agencies from the Kismayo port inland. The logistics lessons learned by the MEU during Restore Hope were almost identical to those learned during Provide Comfort:

- 1 - Supporting both military and humanitarian operations, simultaneously, severely taxes logistics assets.
- 2 - Distribution of large quantities of supplies over long distances requires a significant heavy motor transport capability.
- 3 - U.S. logistics elements will almost inevitably provide support to other coalition members who either lack their own support or did not bring it.<sup>13</sup>

#### **DISASTER RELIEF**

Although humanitarian intervention and disaster relief operations have different political origins and definitions, the missions and concepts of the two, particularly with regards to logistical aspects, share remarkable similarities.<sup>14</sup>

In late August 1992, Hurricane Andrew swept through southern Florida devastating homes and displacing thousands of local residents. A Special Purpose Marine Task Force (SPMAGTF Dade County), very similar in structure and capability to a MEU(SOC), was dispatched as a part of JTF Andrew to help relief efforts.<sup>15</sup> Although a small part of the overall effort, the SPMAGTF proved to be of great assistance due to its rapid response, structure, and logistics capability.

Hurricane Iniki, largely unknown to most Americans because it occurred in the wake of Hurricane Andrew, hit the Hawaiian island of Kauai in early September 1992. As in southern Florida, a SPMAGTF was formed from the Marine Brigade at Kaneohe Bay to provide disaster relief as a part of JTF Hawaii. The force, roughly structured and manned like an MSSG, provided distribution of food, water, and electrical power for nearly one month until civilian agencies could support the public's requirements.<sup>16</sup>

Not suprisingly, the lessons learned during Hurricane Andrew and Hurricane Iniki sound familiar to those of humanitarian interventions: the damage to the civilian infrastructure caused an immediate need for potable water and medical assistance, and truck assets were severely taxed while moving both relief supplies and military personnel and equipment.<sup>17</sup>

#### **NONCOMBATANT EVACUATION OPERATIONS (NEO)**

The call on MEU(SOC)s to conduct operations for the evacuation of U.S. or other citizens from a threatening situation has occurred frequently in the past, and, most recently in Liberia and Albania. Instability in various parts of the globe, much of it stemming from

the collapse of the Soviet Union, would indicate that the possibility of NEOs will not diminish anytime soon. Although they are generally different from humanitarian intervention and disaster relief operations in terms of mission and scope, NEOs can present the same types of logistics challenges to a MEU(SOC).

While it is preferable during NEOs to quickly remove noncombatants and withdraw the evacuating force, there are situations which make this impossible. During Operation Sharp Edge, the first of two NEOs conducted to evacuate personnel in Liberia, operations involving the 22nd and 26th MEU(SOC)s extended from May 1990 to January 1991. Because the U.S. decided to keep the American Embassy in Monrovia open during the course of the Liberian Civil War, the MEU(SOC)s assigned to protect American lives and interests were required to conduct operations for a 7-month period. The logistical demands of this long duration operation, which required the support of ground units, embassy staff, and more than 2,400 evacuees, severely taxed the MEU(SOC)'s capabilities.<sup>18</sup>

Ideally, evacuees are withdrawn from threatening areas by the fastest and most direct means possible. That usually means by helicopter. But circumstances do not always allow helicopter evacuation to be the safest means. Air threat and long distances may preclude the use of helicopters for evacuation. Conditions may require ground transportation, usually military trucks, to be used as an alternative.

Following the collapse of the Albanian government and the resulting anarchy in early March of this year, the 26th MEU(SOC) aboard the Nassau ARG was called upon to conduct a NEO. With

estimates of up to 2,000 American citizens in Tirana, and a rapidly deteriorating situation, the decision was made to conduct a evacuation via helicopter from the U.S. Embassy. After only 400 Americans were evacuated, however, helicopters began drawing small arms fire, and the operation had to be suspended. Plans were in place to evacuate the remaining citizens by ground transportation. Fortunately, though, the situation stabilized enough in a few days to continue helicopter flights. In all, the MEU(SOC) evacuated more than 800 Americans and other foreign nationals. The Albania NEO emphasizes the point that the safety of the evacuees is paramount and that helicopter evacuation will not always be feasible. Had the situation in Albania not improved when it did, the use of MSSG truck assets would have been vital to effect evacuation.<sup>19</sup>

#### **IV. WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR THE MEU(SOC)**

Having looked at examples of how the MEU(SOC) has contributed to humanitarian operations in the recent past, it is important to analyze how new operational concepts being put forth by the Navy and Marine Corps are likely to change the make-up, and possibly, the capability of the MEU(SOC) in the future.

#### **OPERATIONAL MANEUVER FROM THE SEA (OMFTS) - THE THEORY**

Changes in the international geopolitical scene and U.S. orientation since the Cold War have caused the Navy and Marine Corps to shift emphasis in their missions and concepts of operation. The focus has gone from deep ocean operations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization littorals to regional conflicts in coastal waters and adjacent land areas in other parts of the world. Concentrating

on missions oriented toward littoral regions where roughly 70% of the global population lives, the Navy and Marine Corps envision the need to be ready for the full spectrum of conflicts from MOOTW to Major Regional Conflicts (MRCs) in those areas.<sup>20</sup>

To prepare for the full spectrum of conflicts in the future, the Navy and the Marine Corps will attempt to combine the tenets of maneuver warfare, "From the Sea", and "Forward from the Sea" into amphibious operations. Essentially, OMFTS is the operational concept which will attempt a "marriage" between maneuver and naval warfare.<sup>21</sup> What distinguishes OMFTS from other concepts, however, is its extensive use of the sea as a means of gaining advantage, through maneuver, over an enemy.

In the future, Marines will launch into the assault from ships that are farther from shore, carefully picking the beaches where they will hit and attacking targets deeper inside enemy territory. In theory, the ocean will no longer be an obstacle, but an extension of the battlefield itself.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the advent of new high-tech, high-speed equipment such as the Advanced Amphibious Assault Vehicle (AAAV) and the V-22 Tilt-rotor aircraft, will mean that increased speed and maneuverability will allow a landing force to go far deeper into enemy territory than ever before. And, instead of creating a logistics build-up on the beach to support the force, it is envisioned that troops will move from ship to shore to objective in one seamless movement.<sup>23</sup> Virtually all logistics support will be "pushed" by aircraft from aboard ship.

At a glance the theory of OMFTS sounds exciting. Closer analysis, however, indicates that it appears to be almost exclusively

focused on offensive combat operations, not on the most likely missions a MEU(SOC) will become engaged in - humanitarian operations. There is a real danger that the implementation of certain techniques and concepts associated with OMFTS, such as sea-based logistics and the Mini-MEU, may significantly degrade the MEU(SOC)s capability for conducting humanitarian operations.

#### SEA-BASED LOGISTICS (SBL)

SBL is currently being discussed as the method by which amphibious expeditionary forces of the future, such as the MEU(SOC), will be logistically supported. The OMFTS concept suggests that SBL was not a viable logistics method in the past because of the huge requirement of landing forces to place fuel, ammunition, and other supplies ashore.<sup>24</sup>

OMFTS anticipates that improvements in the precision of long-range weapons, greater reliance on sea-based fire support, and an expected decrease in the fuel requirements of military vehicles, promise to eliminate, or at least greatly reduce, the need to establish supply points ashore. As a result, it envisions that the logistics tail of landing forces will be smaller and ship-to-shore movement will take less time. What were previously known as "subsequent operations ashore" will be able to start without the traditional "build-up phase." In other words, landing forces of the future will be able to move directly from ship to their objectives.

The use of a method like SBL to support a light, rapidly moving force whose purpose is to quickly engage a target in offensive combat sounds practical. But once again, the practicality of SBL for supporting humanitarian operations is questionable. In such



operations, logistics elements may be employed in numbers disproportionate to their normal military roles. In fact, as past experiences have shown, logistics elements may precede other military forces or may be the only forces deployed.<sup>25</sup> This raises serious concern since the most likely areas for Marine Corps involvement in the future are humanitarian assistance/disaster relief efforts.<sup>26</sup>

Reducing the size of the MEU(SOC) logistics element, the MSSG, would be certain to limit its effectiveness in humanitarian operations. Before implementing SBL in the MEU(SOC), it would be wise to consider what FMFM 1-1 (Campaigning) says about the role of support; "logistics may determine what is possible and what is not".<sup>27</sup>

THE MINI-MEU(SOC) Another concept being discussed with OMFTS is the Mini-MEU(SOC). It stems from the estimate that amphibious lift requirements in the early part of the 21st century will exceed what is available, even when taking into account the planned fleet of thirty six modern LHAs, LHDs, LSDs, and LPDs. In theory, there will be an increased requirement for forward deployed amphibious and naval expeditionary forces to protect U.S. national interests in the littorals of places like the Indian Ocean and Pacific rim. Under the concept, in order to cover larger regions with fewer assets, the current MEU(SOC) would be reconfigured into smaller "Mini" MEU(SOC)s, each deployed on a one ship ARG.<sup>28</sup>

Notwithstanding the development of modern equipment such as the V-22, AAV, and LCAC, a smaller MEU(SOC) deployed on one ship, as compared with today's three ship configuration, will have less capability - especially when considering the logistics requirements of humanitarian operations. It is also important to note that,

historically, when commanders are forced to downsize units for deployment, they almost inevitably choose to cut logistics instead of combat power. While few would question the wisdom of such a decision, neither would they argue the loss of capability which results.

#### **V. BACK TO THE FUTURE**

Recent experiences with MEU(SOC) deployments in Europe and Africa may have demonstrated what the future holds under OMFTS and the concepts of SBL and Mini-MEUs. For the second time in the last year MEU(SOC)s and their ARGs have been forced to do "split operations" in order to respond to real-world missions and emergency operations. The first split required the 22nd MEU(SOC) and the Guam ARG to retain presence off the Bosnian coast while sending a force to Liberia to conduct a NEO. The most recent split, involving the 26th MEU(SOC) and the Nassau ARG, caused them to separate in order to conduct a NEO in Albania and a possible NEO in Zaire.<sup>29</sup> The result of these split operations was a reduction of capabilities and the acceptance of greater risk for both operations.

There are clear indications that the lessons learned from split operations are similar to those gained from "adaptive force packaging" experiments conducted between 1993 and 1994. These experiments, directed by Adm. Paul Miller, Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Command (CINCUSACOM), saw MEU(SOC) units embark aboard aircraft carriers and deploy with fewer amphibious ships. The following are extracts from the 22nd MEU(SOC)/JTG America lessons learned following the experiment:

- The MEUs capabilities and the spectrum of conflicts to which it was able and ready to respond was reduced.
- The reduction in the number of trucks due to a shortage of vehicle square on amphibious ships meant that mobility ashore was going to be more difficult and more dependent on organic helicopter lift to resupply units in the field. This reduced the flexibility for operational options ashore, overtasked the helos, and drastically restricted mobility.
- The additional reduction of engineer equipment meant that the MEU lacked the capability to provide such assistance in a disaster relief situation without augmentation.<sup>30</sup>

Senior Marine officers echo the same concerns raised by the 22nd MEU(SOC) about the Mini-MEU(SOC) concept. Among them, BGen. Matthew Broderick, former commander of the 24th MEU(SOC), and one who has made eight MEU deployments, stated, "when you split a MEU up, you start losing a lot of capability."<sup>31</sup> As a MEU commander who had to face the prospects of cutting the size of his MSSG due to amphibious lift shortages, BGen. Broderick commented, "The loss of MSSG support equipment severely degrades its maintenance and repair capabilities and its ability to conduct humanitarian assistance, civil affairs, mass casualty and resupply operations".<sup>32</sup>

In general, there is a growing concern among senior Navy and Marine officers that some of the proposed methods of implementing OMFTS might seriously degrade the capabilities of forward deployed MEU(SOC)s and, in fact, may run counter to the strategy identified in "From the Sea" and "Forward from the Sea".

## **VI. ANOTHER OPTION FOR OMFTS**

Perhaps there is a better way to implement OMFTS. Instead of reducing capabilities by experimenting with SBL and Mini-MEUs, it may

be more sensible to retain the present time-tested configuration of the MEU(SOC) and simply reduce the number of deployments conducted in order to more effectively use diminishing Navy and Marine Corps resources.

Since the end of the Cold War, on any given day, at least half of the Navy's ships are underway. One third of those are forward deployed either supporting ongoing missions, showing the flag, or taking part in international exercises. The remainder of those afloat are either in transit and returning home or gearing up for deployment themselves.<sup>33</sup> Deployment tempo in the Marine Corps is no less than in the Navy. With an end strength of 174,000 and 105,000 in the Fleet Marine Force, over 22,000 Marines are deployed on any given day. In addition, some Marine units average as much as 219 days deployed per year - not counting field training exercises prior to deployment.<sup>34</sup>

There is ample evidence that Navy and Marine Corps expeditionary assets are being worn down from overuse. Adm. J. Paul Reason, Atlantic Fleet Commander, testified before congress in March 1997 that the constant commitment of naval forces to regional CINCs is threatening naval readiness. He questioned why, in peacetime, these assets are being used at such a high rate and whether they would truly be ready if a real crisis arose.<sup>35</sup>

Adm. Reason is not the only flag officer raising questions about deployment methods and high tempo. Gen. John J. Sheehan, CINCUSACOM, believes that the end of the Cold War should cause the Navy and Marine Corps to reassess what they do and why they do it. Among other things, he questions the methods of deployment rotations,

suggesting that they are wasteful and may be wearing out the force rather than keeping it ready. Just as concepts of OMFTS explore new methods of maneuver and warfare, Gen. Sheehan recommends that the services break with rigid deployment schedules and come up with new concepts for force projection.<sup>36</sup>

Reducing the number of deployments made by MEU(SOC)s will not only improve overall readiness, but will extend the service life of older weapons and support systems until they can be replaced. It will also allow for a more economical and efficient use of new assets (amphibious ships, LCAC, AAV, V-22, ...) once they are placed in service.

There are those who would argue that true readiness and deterrence requires a continuous forward presence. While there is merit to such a position, it can also be said that the most probable missions will likely provide enough advanced warning for a timely and effective response, and thereby, reduce the need for continuous forward presence. Most humanitarian operations, particularly those requiring humanitarian intervention or NEO, can be anticipated in advance. In such cases, forces could be deployed when sufficient indications and warnings exist to warrant action.

There is one main dilemma, however, that must be addressed by those who will implement OMFTS: do MEU(SOC)s of the future maintain continual forward presence with what may well be a less capable force, or do they establish selective forward presence with a fully capable force?

## VII. CONCLUSION

For many years the MEU(SOC) has proven itself to be an extremely useful tool for regional CINCs. Because it is a capable, flexible, forward deployed force, it has been effective in rapidly responding to a wide variety of situations ranging from MOOTW to conventional and special combat operations. New concepts, such as OMFTS, promise to revolutionize the way naval expeditionary forces conduct operations in the future. The application of these concepts, together with new systems and technologies, promise to produce smaller, yet more capable forces. However, care must be taken to closely analyze new concepts in conjunction with anticipated missions, support requirements, and methods of deployment. Failure to do so may result in a force which is less, not more ready for the future.

It is clear that changes must be made to prepare the MEU(SOC) for the challenges of the 21st century, but, changes should not be made at the expense of capability. Those which reduce the MEU(SOC)s ability to respond to the most probable missions - humanitarian operations - should be avoided if the MEU(SOC) is to remain a viable asset in the years to come.

## ENDNOTES

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